

THE EFFECTS OF BIOMETRIC/RETRENCHMENT EXERCISE ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN YOBE STATE

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***Abstract:** This paper uses secondary sources of data gathering technique to assess the effects of retrenchment in Yobe State on staff performance and quality of work life in the State Public Services. The results shows that the positive/expected perceptions regarding retrenchment includes reducing the number of employees, removing 'deadwood', poor performers, ghost workers, firing excess staff, and establishment of effective management structure for service delivery. Negative perceptions include premature layoff/retirement of work force, creation of poverty to those affected and random dismissal of employees for various reasons. Positive effects of retrenchment on individual performance included improved performance, punctuality, reduced absenteeism, reduction in the number of employees having two, or more jobs and employee efficiency and effectiveness, employee responsibility, and employee accountability, loyalty and discipline were also enhanced. The paper concludes with vital recommendations.*

Keywords: Biometric, Organizational Performance, Quality of Work Life, Retrenchment and Corruption.

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INTRODUCTION

A recent United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) report identify Nigeria as one of the worst country on the earth, with roads that have become death traps, children in the schools are staying under trees to receive their lessons, the school library are not equipped with reading materials that will help the students in furthering their knowledge. In fact even the hospitals are not well equipped with the necessary facilities, Poor electricity supply, and inadequate water supply in the State, among others. All these are attributed to corrupt attitude of some of the nation's leaders at all levels. New political leaders/governments officials often strive to make impact and change the status quo which ultimately has both positive and negative consequences. It was perhaps in line with the above philosophy that an administrator in Yobe State employed a biometric and retrenchment exercise in order to overcome the existing problems and reposition the civil service in the State in particular.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Yobe State was created on 27th of August, 1991. It was carved out of the old Borno State by the Babangida's administration. In spite of the development efforts made by successive administrations, poverty level in the State is far below the national average. The circumstances that led to the splitting of former Borno State into Yobe and Borno were vast land and population. Before the carving out of Yobe State, Borno State was one of the largest States in term of land mass; it comprises of people with different socio-cultural and ethno-religious background. Yobe State is made up of 17 Local Governments Areas, which are zoned into three geo-political zones viz: zone A, zone B and zone C respectively. Among the available tribes are: Kanuri, Fulani, Badawa, Ngizimawa, Karekare, Bolewa, Mangawa, Ngamawa, and Hausas among others. Based on 2006 population census, Yobe State has a population of 2,532,395 (Wikipedia 2011).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Yobe State is one of the richest states in the nation in term solid and mineral resources, but with prevalent poverty. The State is an Agricultural State, blessed with huge amount of mineral resources such as gypsum, kaolin and quartz. The main occupation of the people of the State is farming, which include fishing, rearing of animals (lives stock) and trading. Only few individuals engage themselves in business. In spite of all these resources, significant numbers of the people are living from hand to mouth because of the attitude of corrupt politicians that have tarnished the image of the State, which made most of the citizens to abandoned their farms and business to join politics. When in 2007 late Governor Mamman B. Ali was voted in to power, he went around checking out some of the awarded contracts by the former regime and he unfortunately discovered that 75% of the projects were not executed and the contractors have already collected their money. He then embarked on determining the challenges of the state and to see how to properly address the State's peculiar problem through the committees/panels he formed. Based on some of the recommendations of the committees, The Governor introduced a biometric, cum retrenchment exercise under the able-leadership of the then Commissioner of Finance, Mohammed Hassan in order to sanitise the state, identify and reduce the number of 'Ghost workers' that claim to be genuine civil servants in the State. This biometric exercise which led to the retrenchment of some workers brought a positive change and development in the State.

The Objectives of Biometric/ Retrenchment Exercise in Yobe State

1. To reduce the number of Ghost workers at all levels of government in the State,
2. Improve financial viability in the short and medium term in the State,
3. Strengthen capacity and reverse the progressive decline in public service efficiency and effectiveness in the State,
4. To improve the general service delivery to the public in the State,
5. To sanitise the government operating system in the State,
6. To bring equal development all over the state by adopting the principles of federal character commission in the State,

7. To reduce the degree of corruption at all level in the State, and,
8. To provide the civil servants with adequate social services that will motivate them in performing their duties.

In order to attain the above objectives, one of several strategies that were devised, was the biometric/retrenchment exercise to reduce the size of the civil service and thereby cut down Civil Service employment costs in the State. This is anticipated to improve salaries, quality of work life and performance of workers, and also to improve the living standard of people in the society by providing the general populace with good social services. Some of the discoveries during the biometric/retrenchment exercise are presented in a broad tabular form of only a ministry/board below as a reflection of the other ministries/offices:

TABLE1: Showing the Total Number of Staff in Yobe State Primary Education Board.

S/No	Local Govt	Number of Staff	Staff due for Retirement	Irregular Replacement. /App. of S.S.C.E.	Ghost Workers	Validated Staff.
1	Yusufari	833	49	161	210	623
2	Bursari	610	84	127	211	399
3	Bade	1403	93	134	227	1176
4	Gulani	531	55	112	167	354
5	Tarmawa	261	07	20	27	324
6	Machina	306	10	86	96	210
7	Fune	940	64	215	279	661
8	Jakusko	1028	275	231	306	622
9	Karasuwa	396	23	144	167	229
10	Damaturu	996	12	141	153	843
11	Gujba	1418	26	685	711	707
12	Fika	1237	46	295	341	896
13	Yunusari	403	21	118	139	264
14	Nangere	506	17	84	102	403
15	Gaidam	675	61	185	246	429
16	Nguru	1440	210	185	526	914
17	Potiskum	1392	154	234	388	1004
	Total	14375	1207	3157	4397	9978

SOURCE: (SPEB Record 2008)

The above table shows that Yobe State has a total number of 17 Local Governments Areas (LGA) with their names; the number of Staff in each of the Local Government Areas; the number of Staff due for retirement in each of the LGA; the number of irregular appointments of Staff in each of the LGAs; the number of Ghost workers discovered and the valid Staffers in each of the Local Government Areas in the state. Further still, the above table shows that in all the 17 Local Government areas, there was 14,375 staff; out of this number, 1207 were due for retirement. 3157 members of the staff were irregularly appointed (without due process) and in some cases posted to the respective LGA; while 4397 staff had their names on the various LGA staff list but they were not physically present or on ground during and after the exercise, hence they were considered as 'Ghost

workers' and 9978 staff were considered the valid staff after the successful completion of the biometric exercise in the state.

Effects of Biometric Exercise in Yobe State

Consequent upon the biometric exercise, those that were due for retrenchment were retrenched. Retrenchment generally and in Yobe State in particular, was a government-initiated policy to cut down the excess number of employees and subsequently, reduce costs incurred by government. This policy was within the Civil Service Reform Programs that was implemented in Yobe State by the late Ali's administration in order to reduce the number of 'Ghost workers' in such a way that the government will know and provide its real workers and the general populace with social services, so that each and every civil servant and the citizens will have a role to play in his or her organisation. Civil Service Reform in Yobe State then was necessary because the Civil Service in the State had problems including low pay and benefits, poor management skills, dysfunctional organisation, and inadequate personnel management and training. These led to abuse of office and misuse of government property, moonlighting and corruption, indiscipline, erosion of rules and regulations, obsolete procedures, inappropriate systems, thin managerial and technical skills, poor public service attitudes and massive bureaucratic red tape. The reform obviously helped in human capacity building and skills acquisition at all levels in the State. Majority of the State Civil Servant concord that the retrenchments exercise had a positive effect on employee performance generally. The active labour forces were empowered, their dues and entitlements were paid, deserving members of staff were promoted and every staff member attest to dignity in labour as quality of work life became appreciable. Quality of work life is defined by Lawler (1973) according to Ahmed (2007); 'as the employee perception of their physical and mental well being at work. These perceptions can be favourable or unfavourable'. Quality of working life has been identified by other researchers like Baron and Greenberg (1990) to have the following components: pay, employee benefits, job security, alternative work schedules, job stress, participation in decision making, workplace democracy, profit sharing, pension rights, working hours, programs that enhance workers' welfare and overall job satisfaction in any organisations of the State. Most of the above variables were isolated by the states in Nigerian Institute Surveys as the most important quality of work life issues of the 1980s and beyond. Therefore, retrenchment programs which have positive effects did address some of these components in Yobe State. Productivity and quality of work life are important because where they have been addressed, monetary benefits, improved labour relations, fewer grievances, lower absenteeism, reduced turnover and strikes have been achieved observed Casio (1986). Where it exists, high quality of work life is associated with high job performance he opined. Corroborating, Namatovu (1993) isolated some of the advantages of retrenchment to include restructuring of jobs and departments, reducing of over-staffing, redundancy and overcrowding, improved performance, discipline, efficiency, training and salary enhancement of the civil servant in the State.

However, Behn (1988) cautioned administrators on unnecessary retrenchment by stressing that leaders must explain the reality, take a long term view, develop a corporate strategy, develop measures of performance, and be passionate or considerate. Besides, after the biometric exercise and other investigations, millions of naira was realised as budget surplus that were looted by some government officials and their collaborating contractors in the state. The money surplus was then used to create other job opportunities in the state whereby some youths were selected and sent for training in different field as part of human development in order to boost the manpower need of the state as well as to reduce poverty among the youths in the state. Social services and essential basic amenities were provided to the general populace across the state. Corruption which is also a complex phenomenon that no society is free from, with its root deep in bureaucratic and political institutions and its negative effects on development was evidently minimized after the biometric and retrenchment exercise of Yobe State. Corruption is difficult to define in concise and concrete terms, not surprisingly; there is seldom a consensus as to what exactly constitute this concept. Peter, A and Peter E, (in Tom, 1999) describe corruption by saying " a public official is corrupts if he accept money or money's worth for doing something that he is under duty to do any way". They refer to corruption as the abuse of public office for private as well as personnel gain. Discoveries from the biometric/retrenchment exercise in Yobe inject fear in the hearts and minds of the corrupt public and private office holders, who were force to resort to doing the right thing at the right time without receiving and expecting any illegal inducements. Bentley (1986) listed 3 issues which in effect summarize what has been discussed above to include: redefining the state's mission, reorganizing the structure, and re-staffing/adjusting personnel.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the biometric and retrenchment in Yobe State then had positive and negative effects on individual, and organizational performance, as well as quality of work life. In Nigeria however, biometric and retrenchment are viewed more on the negative in view of it adverse effects on the economy at large. It is the position of this study that biometric and retrenchments must be effectively implemented to enhance quality of work life and effective service delivery with every worker performing their responsibilities for the good and development of the organization/ministries and the nation at large and not for witch hunting legitimate workers. It is most unfortunate that Governor Mamman Ali did not live long enough to permanently institutionalise his moralistic and disciplined principles in the minds and rank and file of civil servants and civil services of Yobe State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) All stakeholders should be properly informed before implementing retrenchment for better public relations and reducing the economic effects of the retrenchment.
- b) Corruption and unprofessional behaviour should be fought at all front and supported by the good people of the state for effective service delivery.

- c) Workers dues and entitlements should be paid promptly and there should be increased funding of ministries/organizations for effective service delivery.
- d) The state should set-up Planning; Implementation and Monitoring Committee, to work together with the Permanent Secretary's' Administrative Reform Commission to facilitate the planning and implementation of the reforms generally.
- e) Retrenchment Committee members must possess the appropriate skills, strategies and tactics needed in implementing and managing retrenchment. This is partly because; retrenchment implies organizational change and change is normally resisted.

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